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Ministry of Forests and Range
Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services

B.C. TO HIRE FOREST SAFETY CORONER, SAFETY PERSONNEL

VANCOUVER – As part of the effort to improve forest safety, the Province is hiring a dedicated safety officer for the Ministry of Forests and Range, a senior manager for safety in the BC Timber Sales Program, and a coroner dedicated to forest safety.

The announcement was made by Forests and Range Minister Rich Coleman at the Truck Loggers Association convention in Vancouver. Coleman told the convention the new positions would complement the Forest Safety Ombudsman announced Tuesday by the BC Forest Safety Council as part of their new safety initiative.

"The best way to get forest workers home safely at the end of the day is to create a culture of safety," said Coleman. "Yesterday we saw the industry make a strong commitment to making that shift, and government is doing the same by making sure every decision we make is reviewed with safety in mind."

Labour Minister Mike de Jong, who attended a recent B.C. Forest Fatality Summit with Coleman, said the dedicated Coroner will help identify common circumstances and underlying factors that could be contributing to forest sector fatalities.

"The forest sector has seen a higher proportion of fatal accidents than other industries," de Jong said. "Bringing added expertise to fatality investigations can help prevent future tragedies."

The Safety Coroner will work in the Coroner's Office under the direction of the Chief Coroner. The Safety Coroner will conduct inquiries into all forest sector fatalities and conduct public inquests if circumstances warrant. As a dedicated resource, the Coroner will help to identify common circumstances and any underlying systemic issues that may be contributing to fatalities.

The two Ministry of Forests and Range positions will improve safety awareness and implement safety programs in both the Ministry and BC Timber Sales.

In addition to the new positions, the Province has taken a number of steps to improve forest worker safety. The Ministry of Forests and Range and BC Timber Sales are developing a safety action plan to complement the activities of the BC Forest Safety Council, including:

- Reviewing legislation, regulations and policies to determine if gaps or conflicts exist with WorkSafeBC. The review will include road use and maintenance policies and quarterly stumpage adjustments;

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- Adopting the Health and Safety Accord of the BC Forest Industry, a Forest Safety Task Force recommendation. The accord represents a commitment to health and safety and will guide changes to attitudes, procedures and operations. It will be posted in all offices and discussed with staff and Occupational Health and Safety committees; and
- Working co-operatively with the forest industry to establish industrial forest road maintenance standards by spring 2006.

Coleman said the Province is serious about tackling safety issues and that these changes will help significantly. He said the Ministry of Forests and Range will continue to work with the BC Forest Safety Council to seek ways to improve forest worker safety.

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